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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (MODIFIED TEXT IN PARA 7)

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TAGS: [CM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#)
SUBJECT: CAMEROON'S DISORGANIZED OPPOSITION SDF

REF: A. YAOUNDE 724
[1](#)B. YAOUNDE 792

Classified By: PolOff Erik Martini for reasons 1.4 (b) and (c)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Uncertainty over prospective presidential candidates, problems with internal party discipline, and a divisive corruption issue threaten the status of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) as Cameroon's largest opposition group. Adding to Cameroon's political uncertainty are promises of demonstrations by both the SDF and other opposition activists. While elections in 2011 remain distant, political pressure continues to build, especially as some fear President Biya may advance the election date. End summary.

No Presumptive SDF Presidential Candidate

[1](#)2. (C) Kah Walla, SDF leader and member of the Douala City Council, recently told poloff discussions were underway in the SDF to put forward a consensus party presidential candidate. She hinted the SDF would not nominate John Fru Ndi, the longtime SDF leader and former presidential candidate, but she would not specify an alternative. She said many in the SDF were looking for new, younger leadership. Neither Walla nor prominent Douala-based SDF parliamentarian Jean Michel Nintcheu would deny they were interested in running for president when asked separately by poloff. In a another meeting with poloff, SDF Secretary General Elizabeth Tamajong, who is considered close to Fru Ndi, would not speculate on the SDF candidate, insisting that a party convention would choose.

Discipline Problem an SDF Nuisance

[1](#)3. (SBU) While the SDF contemplates its presidential candidate, an internal discipline problem continues to dog the party. On May 20, SDF leadership announced a general boycott of the Cameroonian National Day celebrations, citing the deplorable state of the nation. Serge Simeon Nomba, the only SDF parliamentarian from the West Region, broke with the leadership and participated in a parade in his home region. Since then, the SDF has been agonizing over how to respond to his indiscipline, especially because expelling Nomba would deprive them of their "group" status in the parliament. (Note: The SDF needs to retain 16 out of a total of 180 seats in parliament to be considered a "group." It currently has just 16 seats, while the next largest opposition representation in parliament holds only one seat. A parliamentary group allows the party to have a seat on the steering committee, which governs parliament and conducts business on behalf of parliament when parliament is out of session. The group chair and vice-chair are also entitled to

official government residences. End note.) The SDF recently announced that a decision on the matter would be postponed until November.

Declaration of Assets Controversy Adds to SDF Woes

¶4. (C) The SDF leadership has been further tested by Article 66 of the constitution, which requires government employees to declare their personal assets. Intended to fight corruption and increase transparency in government, the article is widely ignored, unenforced and unimplemented, most famously by President Paul Biya himself. Fru Ndi announced several months ago that he would declare his assets but recently said he would not follow through, rightly pointing out he is under no legal requirement to do so, as he is not a government employee. Nonetheless, media reports on Fru Ndi's stance have been critical, wondering why he would not take the high road and draw the distinction between himself and President Biya in more stark terms, especially since he had promised to disclose his assets. Nintcheu, one of the few government officials to have declared his assets, told poloff many in the party were upset with Fru Ndi's decision.

SDF Hints at Unrest

¶5. (C) Nintcheu told poloff he would personally lead peaceful anti-government protests, as he did in February, ¶2008. He planned to demand specifically the reconstitution of ELECAM, Cameroon's controversial electoral commission, and reform of the electoral code. Kah Walla also separately promised protests with similar demands. Both believed

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President Biya would never make significant changes to the electoral machinery without protests. They also thought it highly probable Biya would change the election date (ref A) to prevent the opposition from organizing. Nintcheu said Cameroonian youth were at the point of revolt. In a recent meeting with Ambassador, Fru Ndi said the average Cameroonian had fallen below "floor" level (i.e. public opinion has hit rock bottom) and none of the problems sparking the 2008 violence had been solved.

Other Opposition Voices Echo Political Uncertainty

¶6. (C) SDF concerns are consistent with vibes from other opposition activists. One independent journalist recently told poloff he believed political and economic conditions were worse than in 2008. Bernard Njonga, civil society activist and director of the Citizen Association for the Defense of Collective Interests, promised he would lead protests at the end of August in Douala, although the protests turned into muted "cultural gatherings" dubbed as a national tour throughout the month of September. Hilaire Kamga, Director of the prominent human rights NGO "The New Rights of Man," recently told Pol/Econ Chief he plans to roll out a major civil society platform for change in October. In a recent meeting with Ambassador, Progressive Movement party parliamentarian Jean Jacques Ekindi said ELECAM does not yet have a full budget and has not received any equipment or resources from the old election commission. He also noted that Cameroon's election law does not even conform to the 2008 constitutional revision. On whether President Biya would advance the election date, Ekindi believed ELECAM's lack of preparedness would act as a deterrent.

Comment

¶7. (C) Despite the failure of major protests to materialize so far in 2009, the threat of political unrest could build as the election draws nearer. On the other hand, vague statements about protests and youth revolts create a sense

that the SDF would prefer to fall back on hackneyed rhetoric than attempt a strategic approach to political change. By raising the possibility of a new "consensus candidate," the SDF demonstrates that it can think outside its box. However, it is not clear they have done any outreach to other parties, or disgruntled elements within the CPDM, to organize a viable candidate. Our sense is that at this point other party leaders would not rally behind an SDF candidate. We are also dubious that current discussions about the need for a newer, younger candidate will survive what will surely be a full court press by John Fru Ndi to ensure that he continues to carry the standard of the SDF. These elements combined lead us to believe that, whether or not Biya advances the election date, the opposition is likely to be unprepared. We will continue to advocate for improved election machinery (ref B) and a healthy political competition. End Comment.

PETERSON